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Mr. STRONG's

SERMON,

AT THE FUNERAL OF

Mrs. Lathrop.

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A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF

Mrs. Jerusha Lathrop,

WHO DIED *SEPTEMBER*, 14, 1805,

Æt. 88.

BY JOSEPH STRONG,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN NORWICH.

NORWICH,

PRINTED BY HENRY TRUMBULL,

1805.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 1.

A good name is better than precious ointment.

IN many inſtances, regard to deceaſed perſons and benevolence to the world, dictate that we entomb their body and memory in the ſame grave;—but there are others who demand a tribute of public reſpect, and whoſe lives may be reviewed with equal pleaſure and advantage. If any thing in this world is to be coveted, it is the good name. The authority of Solomon, goes far to eſtabliſh ſuch a point. A man of correct judgment and who had made a full experiment of every earthly bleſſing, his deciſion muſt be concluſive. Superior to that univerſal principle in human nature to appreciate unduly what is beyond the reach of poſſeſſion, experience was his inſtructor. He wrote from perſonal knowledge, and not from mere ſpeculation. "I gathered me alſo ſilver and gold, and the peculiar

treaſures of kings and of provinces; I gat me men ſingers and women ſingers, and the delights of the ſons of men, as muſical inſtruments, and that of all ſorts. So I was great, and increaſed more than all that were before me in Jeruſalem; alſo my wiſdom remained with me, and whatſoever mine eyes deſired, I kept not from them; I with-held not my heart from any joy: for my heart rejoiced in all my labour, and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked upon all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and behold all was vanity and vexation of ſpirit, and there was no profit under the ſun." Contraſt this experimental ſketch—theſe effuſions of diſguſt, with the approving language which the text uſes, and thence learn the ſuperior value of a good name.—"*A good name is better than precious ointment.*"

In what may be now farther offered from theſe words, two objects ſhall be kept in view;—the circumſtances eſſential to the acquirement of a good name, and the advantages with which it is certain to be accompanied.

By the good name, we are to underſtand that place

in the eſteem of mankind which inclines them not to diſapprove or cenſure, but to approbate and commend. It will not indeed be pretended, that real deſert of character, always enſures ſuch to be the caſe. Often do the vicious and undeſerving, command a no ſmall ſhare of applauſe; while the virtuous and uſeful, ſink under the ſcourge of tongues. Envy with the other malignant paſſions are moſt commonly at war with the good character. Does ſuch ſuperior worth occaſionally riſe to view as awes the malevolent into ſilence and admiration, for the moſt part it is their employment and higheſt pleaſure, to worry and hunt down the innocent. But availing for a time as ſuch unprovoked cruel efforts are, they uſually prove ſhort lived. The poiſon of defamation, produces its own cure. The good ſenſe and humanity of far the larger half of mankind unite to pour oil and wine into the wounds made upon character, reſtore it to ſoundneſs, and thus do much to render it invulnerable againſt ſimilar attacks in future. Provided the good name does not ſuppoſe the approbation of all, it does of the judicious, the benevolent, and thoſe diſpoſed to eſtimate men and things in conformity to ſtrict deſert. Such is the general im-

port of a good name; but it will be readily conceived, that a number of things both natural and acquired, are eſſential to its exiſtence and perfection.

A FOUNDATION circumſtance of the kind, is an amiable diſpoſition. Great abilities, when under the guidance of the more rough and boiſterous paſſions, may excite admiration, but rarely do they conciliate eſteem. Provided nature has not duly meliorated the mind, art and induſtry ſhould on no account fail to perfect the work. The natural tendency of the paſſions, when permitted to proceed without controul, is to diſapprobation and cenſure. The teſtimony of obſervation is deciſive to the point, that however much nature and education have done for perſons, the unreſtrained indulgence of their feelings, will always render them objects of contempt, and often of deteſtation. Irritable, avaritious, envious and revengeful, the addreſs made is to the paſſion of fear and not of love. Who will be likely to ſpeak well of thoſe, that ſcatter firebrands, arrows and death, tho they may ſay the whole is done in ſport. Moderate abilities, when adorned with a meek and quiet ſpirit, rarely fail to be ſpoken well of. In poſſeſſion of little to be

envied, the whole tendency of life, is to win the affections and make friends.

It is alſo of importance, to the acquirement of a good name, that the conduct be beneficent and uſeful. —There can not be a more correct remark than that of inſpiration, "he that hath friends, muſt ſhew himſelf friendly." Who ever did or will applaud the conduct of thoſe, to whom the words of St. James apply "if a brother or ſiſter be naked or deſtitute of daily food, and one of you ſay unto them depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithſtanding ye give them not thoſe things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?" What a ſtriking contraſt to this was the munificence of that poor widow, who caſt her two mites into the treaſury. Thus forward to increaſe the ſtock for public charity; it may be preſumed ſhe was not forgetful of the poor in private, provided there were any poorer than herſelf to be found.—With that noble benevolent ſpirit ſhe poſſeſſed, had her mites been pounds, they would have been diſtributed with equal readineſs and increaſed ſatisfaction. It is a circumſtance painful to reflect upon, that affluence and munificence ſo rarely concentre in the ſame perſon. The

poor who wiſh to do much, find themſelves circumſcribed in their means ; while the rich, the abounding, the overflowing feel no heart to the meaſure. This is often, though not always the caſe. Thank God, there are exceptions to the fact. It cannot be ſaid with truth, that a poor Jewiſh widow was alone liberal.—Some of the rich of each ſex have at every period done nobly in the ſame line ;—though I believe the remark correct, that female charities both for religious purpoſes and the relief of the unfortunate, have been the moſt frequent and abundant. Conſidering the extent of ability, their charitable beſtowments have been the greateſt. What will not the more ſoft and ſympathetic feelings of the ſoul do, when animated by the ſpirit of pure and undefiled religion ?

In order to poſſeſs and ſupport the good name, there is required further, that the converſation be dignified and moral. It was in view of what this remark imports, that a ſubſequent chapter obſerves—" dead flies cauſe the ointment of the apothecary to ſend forth a ſtinking ſavour ; ſo doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wiſdom and honour. A wiſe man's heart is at his right hand ; but a fool's heart is at his

left. Yea alſo when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wiſdom faileth him, and he ſaith to every one that he is a fool." The deſign of this, is not to diſcountenance cheerfulneſs or even humour, when timed judiciouſly and not carried to exceſs. The ſpirits are thus enlivened, and the body preſerved from dangerous relaxation. The fool, in the wiſe man's ſenſe of the word is none other than the arrant trifler;—a character placed at an equal remove from innocence, uſefulneſs, and reſpectability. And authoriſed to affirm thus of the trifler, whoſe conduct involves ſuch a train of unwelcome conſequences; what muſt be ſaid of thoſe, whoſe immorality is more direct and outbreaking. I will not take the precaution to ſelect perſons of principle, but will appeal to the moſt profligate who now hear me; do you find it in your hearts to give a good name to the drunkard, the laſcivious, the extortioner, the ſabbath breaker, the profaner of God's name and ordinances, with others of the ſame general deſcription? An inbred ſenſe of propriety, brands their whole number with infamy. The lips which undertake to praiſe them, without fail give the lie to the more correct ſentiments of the heart. All muſt unite in the de-

ciſion, that they are the ſober and exemplary only, whoſe name is like the precious ointment. With thoſe thus ſober and exemplary in view, be their circumſtances what they may :—be they rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate, the univerſal voice is certain to be decided and loud in ſpeaking well of them.

Once More.---It is in vain to expect the good name, without we are truly religious. May an amiable diſpoſition, uſefulneſs in life, and a diſplay of the moral virtues, command a ſhare of approbation ; yet without an heart ſincerely devoted to God, a good name in the higheſt ſenſe of the word, will not be acquired. That eye of ſcorn, with which many look upon the friends of virtue and the ſlander they utter againſt them, are no ſubſtantial objection to the juſtice of ſuch a remark. Could we penetrate the hearts of theſe deſpiſers and ſlanderers, their real ſentiments would be found to give the lie to their profeſſions. When their own intereſts are at ſtake, they without fail ſhew a preference for the deciſion of the virtuous, rather than that of the oppoſite deſcription of perſons. In all matters either of confidence or truſt, they ſelect the chriſtian in preference to the infidel, for their

friend. Or to ſeclude ſuch a circumſtance from view, we need advance only a ſingle ſtep further, in order to give demonſtration to the argument. Place the religious man in his grave;--reduce him to that humble ſtate, where his virtues do not operate as an implied cenſure upon thoſe leſs circumſpect and moral; the tongue of obloquy is generally ſilent and in ſome inſtances is changed to that of approbation and applauſe. May this be the unintentional act of an heart now diveſted of envy, or a deſigned matter as attonement for paſt injuſtice; the fact is concluſive to our preſent purpoſe, that heart religion is an attribute eſſential to the perfecting of a good name. It was under the impreſſion of what theſe remarks import, that Solomon obſerved in his proverbs--"Wiſdom is the principal thing; therefore get wiſdom and with all thy gettings get underſtanding. Exalt her and ſhe ſhall promote thee; ſhe ſhall bring thee to honour, when thou doſt embrace her. She ſhall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory ſhall ſhe deliver to thee."

Such are ſome of the leading circumſtances, requiſite to conſtitute that good name which the text recommends.

The 2nd principal object of the discourse, was to notice the fitness of the ascription to such the good name "that it is better than precious ointment." It can hardly be needful to remind you, of the great use which the ancients made of ointments and of the vast expence which they were at, for the purchase of those of certain kinds. They were accounted and treated as among the highest luxuries of life.—The expression now under review, has a figurative allusion to such facts and was not unaptly chosen to designate the superiour value of a good name. But few branches of acquisition, are equally conducive both to our own advantage and that of others. There is no more productive source of personal enjoyment, than a consciousness of possessing and deserving a good name. Hence what the preacher observes "the light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart; and a good report maketh the bones fat." Striped of its figurative dress, this was to affirm: that an assurance of being held in esteem by others, is something so grateful to the heart, as to communicate health and vigour to the body. It is the remark of one who had made human nature an object of his particular study "that those persons have some-

thing very degenerate in them and their conduct is highly unnatural, whose fondness for reputation has seemingly become extinct. Who are heard to say, I will pursue my own designs;—I will please myself without remotely caring what others think of me"—arrived to such a point, not of manly independence but of shameful self-conceit, the social feelings without fail fast degenerate and the individual is soon lost in a great measure, both to himself and to the world.—Nor do the scriptures discountenance in any degree, the spirit of these remarks. Do we indeed hear them pronounce a woe upon those who are spoken well of by all men; it is upon the ground that their popularity is acquired by making a sacrifice of conscience and the truth;—or do they at another time speak in unfavourable terms of those who love the praise of men, it is solely because they love it more than the praise of God. They make it a primary object of regard, when in fact it ought to be viewed and treated only as a secondary one.

Another circumstance which appreciates in no small degree a good name, is its subserviency to increased usefulness in the world. There is nothing

which adds greater weight both to good advice and a good example. Things ſaid or done by the infamous, are in no inſtance ſo likely to command notice and operate beneficially, as if they proceeded from the reputable. Upon the benevolent principle of doing the greateſt poſſible good to mankind, a good name is therefore to be laboured for as an object of the firſt conſideration.

Once more, endeavours to acquire and ſupport a good name are alſo recommended from that ſtrong deſire inherent to every one, to be thought well of after death. If this remark is only an extenſion of the paſt one, it certainly extends it with propriety and to great advantage. It was no doubt the ſentiment upon which the wiſe man's thoughts principally reſted, when he penned the text. As one principal uſe made of precious ointment was to embalm the dead body, ſo a good name, embalms the memory, "and hands down character to future generations in a ſtate of high preſervation." Nor is a wiſh to be thus remembered with reſpect when in the grave, altogether ſelfiſh. The one who has ſpent life in doing good, is not ſatisfied with the paſt, but wiſhes to lengthen out the benevolent pro-

eels. He is emulous that his virtues being regiſtered in the minds of after livers, ſhould excite imitation. Hence what David teſtified—"the righteous ſhall be had in everlaſting remembrance,"—and to the ſame amount by his ſon, "the memory of the juſt is bleſſed." A monument thus reared to perſonal worth, often ſurvives the ſepulchral marble, however coſtly and to appearance durable. While the latter ſoon tumbles into promiſcuous ruin; the former acquires freſh beauty and ſtrength, from the eſteem and veneration of impartial grateful poſterity. "A good name is better than precious ointment."

"I HAVE now compleated thoſe remarks, which were originally propoſed from the text:—remarks dictated to me, by the late death of an highly eſteemed mother in this our Iſrael. How much perſonal worth and what a great ſhare of relative goodneſs, has in the referred to inſtance been made to leave the world.—Had not the life of Mrs. *Lathrop** been open to the view of you all and deſervedly extolled by not a few;

* Mrs. LATHROP was the daughter of Governor TALCOTT of Hartford. She was married to Dr. DANIEL LATHROP, of Norwich, December 1744. Dr. LATHROP was graduated at Yale College 1733, and ſpent a number of

I ſhould feel myſelf under obligation, to enter into its details at very conſiderable length. I ſhall not excite a diſſenting voice by the remark ; that as a model of amiable, uſeful, and exemplary living ſhe has been exceeded by few.—Always cheerful, ſhe never departed from the rules of ſtrict decorum. A profeſſor of religion, ſhe to appearance loved it ; and certainly not a few of its richeſt fruits hung thick upon her. Her charities are well known.--For a long courſe of years,

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the succeeding years, in a course of medical studies in London. With these advantages from education and an acquaintance with foreign manners, but few men have been better qualified to be agreeable and useful in the world. After his return to this country, in addition to his professional employment, he engaged extensively in mercantile concerns. Industry and system were prominent features in all his undertakings. He unvaryingly manifested a strong attachment to the interests of literature and religion. Placed by providence in easy circumstances and blessed with a most worthy companion ; a number of the first years after his marriage were unusually agreeable and prosperous. No adverse incident took place in his family until 1751, when he was called to part with all his children, three promising sons, who were interred in the same grave. From that period, the indigent and unfortunate, became the objects of his increased attention and munificence. That liberal spirit which animated the husband's heart and formed a striking trait in his life ; survived in his widow. Tho her mental powers, were much enfeebled for a number of years before her death, she never forgot the poor. Extremely forgetful in most other instances, the indigent were never out of her thoughts. It was but a short period before her death that she ceased to give particular directions, with respect to the objects and extent of her charitable bestowments.

they have been even proverbial. Her pecuniary resources were never directed to the miser's hoard or to the ostentatious parade of high life; but to assist the indigent, to relieve the sick, and to make glad the widow and the fatherless. There are many of her neighbours and acquaintance, who must feel themselves constrained "to rise up and call her blessed." "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord; yea saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

UNINTERESTING as these characteristic sketches are to the dead, the same is by no means fact with respect to the living. They rather call loudly to us, for imitation.---When shortly the mortal part of our venerable friend shall be laid in the grave; may her charitable spirit take deep root and flourish in all our bosoms "bringing forth fruit unto holiness and in the end everlasting life."